

The CIRCLE

IT BE TRUE-TO WANT A LOVE THAT
SEEK A KISS NOT MINE ALONE, TO
YOU, TIME AND TIME AGAIN I WENT
AGAIN, THESE WORDS I'D HAVE
NOW IT'S WRONG- IT MUST BE WH
LONG WITHOUT YOU I CANTO
-IF YOU HAD A SENCE OF HO
LOOK AT YOURSELF- DO YOU
SIMPLY GRAND? SINCE YOU TOOK
THAT TOOTH PASTE
IS ALL A TUMBLE-
Y MUMBLE-FOOLS
MORE THAN GLAD
OUT HERE AND MORE
REOQUIRE LOVE'S
PRETTY BAD BUT FOR
A PLEASURE TO BE SAD.
WITH NO MAMMY AND

Spring 1991
Volume 16
Number 2

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About the Cover

The cover of this issue is a lithograph by Elaine Spicer, 04VAT, titled "Lady Day." "Lady Day," the legendary nickname given to late jazz singer Billie Holiday by her friend, saxophone player Charlie Parker, incorporates photo-copied photographs and drawings from various stages of Billie Holiday's troubled life. The hand-composed type is a portion of lyrics selected from three of Billie Holiday's songs. Ms. Spicer says she was inspired by Billie Holiday because she loves her music and admires her determination. Ms. Spicer comments, "The fact that she was black and female in the '30s and '40s but was able to deal with people's prejudices and to transcend those barriers through her art is why I admire her so much." The lithograph was shot in four-color process for *The CIRCLE* from a 29- by 18 1/2-inch original.

Colophon

The Spring issue of *The CIRCLE* is the second issue published in the 1990-1991 academic year. All color art was shot in four-color process. The magazine was printed on 7-point white matte with an 8-point chrome cover stock by Auburn University Printers, Auburn, Alabama. Type faces used are Bookman for prose and Helvetica for poetry. Art by-lines are in Helvetica 9-point, and headlines are in Bookman 72-point.

Submission Guidelines

Prose and poetry should be submitted with a cover sheet including the name of the piece, the name of the author, the type of work (poem, fiction, essay) and local phone number and address. Personal information for the contributors' page should also be included on this sheet. This is the only place where the author or artist's name should appear.

Submissions on computer disk are preferred when possible, accompanied by a hard copy of the manuscript. Please include the file name and the title of the work on the disk. Also indicate the type of computer and the program used.

Artists should follow the same procedure for a cover sheet using an 8 1/2- by 11-inch piece of paper. In addition, please include the medium (watercolor, photograph, pen and ink) and the dimensions of the work.

Additional information may be obtained from *The CIRCLE* office in Foy Union. The telephone number is (205) 844-4122.

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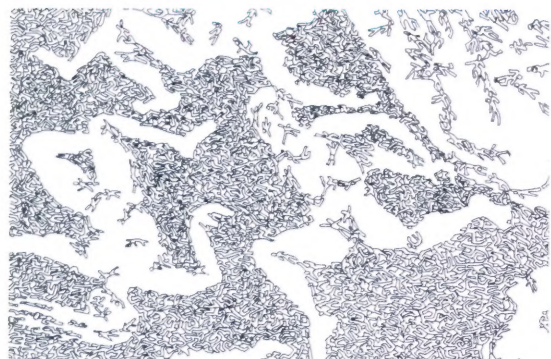
Spring 1991 Volume 16, Number 2

The CIRCLE, financed by Auburn University student activity fees, serves as a forum for the writers and artists within the university community. It aims to appeal to a diverse Auburn audience by providing a variety of articles, essays, short stories, poetry, art and photography. The views expressed throughout the issue are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the publisher (the Board of Student Communications), *The CIRCLE* Editorial Board and Staff, Auburn University, its administration, student body, or Board of Trustees.



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From Top to Bottom:

Detail of lithograph by Elaine Spicer from cover

Detail of pen and ink drawing by Chris Naylor from p. 12

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rhyme of a maker

she thought of the pieces and breaks,
the fragments
that become a woman's life.
the illusions we
project
into the emptiness,
when our souls can serve the void much,
much better.

she thought of how she tried to take
the silent wind
beyond her one flat window to the sky
to remake it
breathing—
exhaled, given a name and noise
its own.

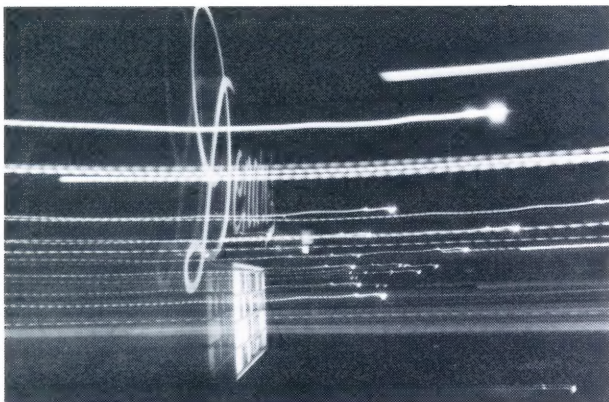
with the coming banishment of light, she thought
of the desert at night
so deceptive—
and after the rain,
the sand's regeneration
absorbing all those who had once walked
there.

it made her laugh uncontrollably,
the sterility and the life
how much it gives and takes,
ends and makes us all.

she thought of this as
she slipped into dreams,
dreaming so hard
she slept

and woke to the rhyme of the rain.

Todd Keith



"Swish," Rick Helmick, photograph 9 1/2" x 7"

Completing the Circuit

I sit here for days at a time,
Watching the violet stain slowly down
The walls of the motel room,

Listening to the conversations of maids
Distorted by panelled walls, or foreign
Tongues. When I switch on the TV,

I see no more a directed program
Than a red and blue dot matrix—
Each square in its own place, magnified

Downward into itself until there is no color,
No design, except the chaos of massive
Input and the accidental elimination

Of logic. Yet I feel that surge pull
Me into endless wires intertwined,
Some silver hair cut precisely too short:

Up through ceiling tiles and soldered lines,
The room breaks into a thousand feet
Of hollow pipe. That is freedom.

Electrons may bounce madly into nothing,
And mountains might not move at all,
But I shall sing of shallow currents

Racing through the smallest of leaves,
Of kingdoms besieged in the longest of nights,
And the tint of her eyes in the new morning sun.

When the lines fade to whiteness,
And the circuits again meet:
Fortitude comes in eternal waves.

Simmons B. Buntin



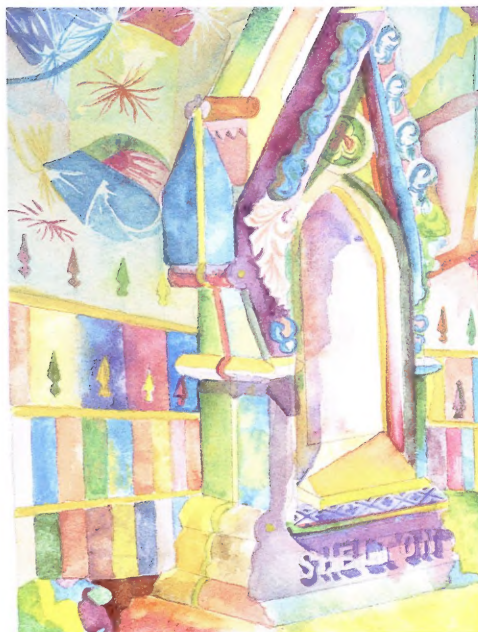
"In Transit," Brad Wagner, photograph 9 1/2" x 7"

Portfolio

Art by Nancy Murphree

The watercolor "Mahalia" is an abstraction of a tombstone in an Auburn cemetery. It was the first piece Ms. Murphree painted in this style, which is prevalent in her subsequent work.

"At the Wharf" was inspired by a trip to San Francisco and is based on a black and white photograph taken at Ghiradelli Square. Using a black and white photo ensures that preconceived colors are not used, that color is purely ornamental.



"Mahalia," watercolor 7 ³/₄" x 11"



"At the Wharf," watercolor 16" x 24"

Cobra's Neck

By Chris Smith

The coffee was too hot. It looked like the kind of coffee that would char his tastebuds. Leonard hated that feeling. It was almost as bad as stepping in a shower puddle with socks on. Of course, you could always change your socks.



Illustration by Karen Scarborough

If Bryan were here, he would suggest that Leonard dip his finger in the coffee to see whether it was hot. Bryan would tell him to stop thinking about how hot the damn coffee was and just drink it.

But Bryan was late. They were supposed to meet at 8:30. Leonard lit his first cigarette at the Fort Payne, Alabama, Huddle House at 8:41 a.m. He hated waiting. And he hated being alone in weird places like this. Perhaps waiting wouldn't have been so bad if he hadn't learned the stages of waiting in one of his psychology classes. First, he felt the superiority of being on time, then annoyance. The annoyance became anger. The fourth stage was when it started to hurt. That's when he began to worry. And calculate. And list.

1. I gave him the wrong directions, and he's waiting at the wrong exit.

2. His car broke down.

3. We were actually supposed to meet at 8:00, I screwed up, and he left without me.

4. He overslept, is still asleep,

and will take another half hour to get ready, and another hour and a half to drive here from Birmingham, assuming he wakes up now.

5. He had an accident.

6. He decided not to convoy with me and has no way of telling me since I'm at a Huddle House in god-forsaken Fort Payne and not at home.

Leonard decided to taste the coffee. He put out his cigarette and eased the bowl of his spoon into the cup, watching the metal bend the coffee's surface. It would make a great painting. But painting wouldn't get him anywhere. He had to stop thinking about painting. After the pressure broke and the coffee rolled across the spoon, he dipped it slightly further down. He thought about leaving. He and Bryan were both going north for jobs, Bryan to the University of Massachusetts, Leonard to a drafting job in Philadelphia. Convoying made perfect sense. When Bryan asked about it, Leonard felt obliged, even complimented. Five years of college together was too much to say no. Satisfied with the amount of coffee in the spoon, Leonard lifted it and warily sipped the contents. The coffee was cold. In fact, it was cold when he began the list and it was lukewarm when he lit the cigarette. It was comfortably drinkable when it was poured, and even more so when he added cream to it.

As he gulped the coffee, he thought of how Bryan would have laughed at him if Bryan had not been late.

At 8:58, he called Bryan's house. There weren't any coins in the change tray. Someone had spilled coffee or grease on the buttons. The zero was hard to push. He worried that it might stick and he would dial the opera-

tor five times. The phone rang nine times with no answer. Bryan was either asleep or on his way.

He drank the coffee, noting how comfortably drinkable it was, and lit his second cigarette of the morning at 9:28. He didn't usually smoke this early, but he was nervous, bored, angry, and the cigarette made everything taste better. Except itself.

Leonard finally saw the obnoxious orange 1976 Gremlin. There is only one orange 1976 Gremlin in existence. It was blue when a coven of Deadheads bought it used in 1978 and painted it. Before they could add the teddybears, skeletons and American flags, they'd sold the car for tickets and "travel accessories" for a Grateful Dead show in Houston. Bryan's father had bought the car for him when he graduated high school in 1985.

Leonard dropped his head in relief. Nervous tension dripped off his fingertips as the bells strapped to the door handle announced Bryan's arrival at the diner.

"Did you make a list?" Bryan asked.

Leonard shook his head.

"C'mon, let me see it." Bryan's shoulder-length blonde hair was windblown around his face. Leonard couldn't see his eyes.

"Forget it. Are you hungry?"

"No. Not yet. Oh, I think I found a shortcut."

"Y'know, when I hear you suggest a shortcut, I hear you saying, 'Hey, Len. I found another way we can risk getting lost.'"

Bryan unfolded his map. "No, really. Look, we can take I-59 to I-75 and get on 74 in Cleveland, Tennessee. Then we can stop in Murphy, North Carolina, and have lunch with Jenny and Coop."

Leonard dragged on his

cigarette and considered crushing it out on Murphy.

Bryan followed the highways with his finger. "Then we can get on I-40 and go through Winston-Salem. I bet we can pick up some cheap cartons there. Then we get on I-85, and we've got a straight shot to D.C. The only two-lane roads we have to worry about are in North Carolina on 74 a little ways near Ducktown, and later just before Murphy."

"Do Jenny and Coop know we're coming?"

"I called them last night after I talked to you," Bryan said.

"Which explains why you never told me about this."

"Sorry. Don't you want to see them?"

"We won't get there until three or so."

"We'll make it in plenty of time. Are you ready to head?"

Leonard finished his coffee and paid the waitress. He caught up to Bryan at the cars. Bryan was making sure his tapes and cigarettes were within arm's reach.

"Did you buy those walkie-talkies?" Bryan asked.

Leonard saw his own reflection in the window of a van parked next to the Gremlin.

"Yeah," Leonard said. "They're Starcode Elevens." Bryan burst out laughing.

"They have floppy rubber-tipped antennas for safety and even a Morse code function."

"Do you know Morse code?" Bryan asked.

Leonard continued to stare at his eyes in the van window as he talked. They were brown. Not hazel, not light black, not ice blue like Bryan's. Brown. His eyebrows peaked only slightly and his cheekbones stood out sharply on his face. Those cheekbones would've made him a good flash metal guitarist, but he didn't have enough finger coordination to fake it.

"No, do you?"

"No, but we could fake it, I guess," Bryan said.

Leonard decided not to mention their thought synchronicity. It would only make things painful.

Leonard's focus on the van window shifted as he turned toward Bryan. Just as he stepped back, he saw another face beneath his own. It was the profile of a worried middle-aged woman sitting in the van, trying not to notice Leonard staring at her.

Leonard started and blushed. Then he broke down laughing, staggering to his car.

"What did you just do?" Bryan asked.

"I stared at the wrong reflection," Leonard replied in broken laughter.

"What?"

"I was—oh—never mind."

Bryan pulled himself out of his car. "I thought you only got this way late at night."

"I didn't get enough sleep, I guess."

"Let me see one of the walkie-talkies," Bryan said.

Leonard unlocked his car and searched through his overpacked backseat. He found one and gave it to Bryan.

"That rules!" Bryan said with a chuckle. "Here's the tapes I want you to hear."

"Did you ever buy those Pixies albums?"

"No. I had to either pay off my bounced checks or buy the albums and go to jail."

"Wise choice," Leonard said.

"You ready?"

"Yeah, let's hit it."

"You need to drive in front. My speedometer's broken."

"Oh, great. Did you fix your headlight?"

"Yeah. I'll flash them when I want to talk to you."

"All right," Bryan said. "I'll see you on the road."

They pulled out of the Huddle House parking lot and climbed the exit ramp. Leonard's '78 Nova engine chortling in anguish at the sudden uphill acceleration.

Radio contact was harder than Leonard expected. If he drove too far behind Bryan, all he could hear was static. If he followed close enough for communication, he risked smashing into the Gremlin. Neither of them was strong enough to handle that.

The traffic slowed when they got past Cleveland, Tennessee, and took the exit onto highway 74. Bryan and Leonard flashed their lights at the same time.

"Hey, Len! How you doing back there?"

"Just fine. We've been on the road for an hour and a half now. Are you ready for a break?"

"No. We'll be at Jenny and Coop's in about an hour. Let's wait till then."

"How fast are we going, anyway?"

"About 60."

"Hey—uh . . . Bryan."

"Yeah?"

"Let's make sure we exchange addresses and phone numbers at the next stop." He let go of the "speak" button and waited.

"Good idea. I might need to borrow money from you in a few years."

Leonard knew Bryan was only joking. But sometimes he wished Bryan were more sentimental. No, that wouldn't be Bryan. Every Bryan needed a fault or two to be tolerated. And every Leonard needed a Bryan. "I think you'll do fine without me."

"I don't know. Rex said I'd have enough to survive, but not to expect much more."

"Then try to avoid bar tabs and theatre tickets."

"Do you know what your salary will be?" Bryan asked.

"The lady I talked to said I'd start at around eighteen. That'll be okay for a while."

"Yeah. Well, I'm signing off. It's hard to smoke with these things."

"All right. Later." Leonard clicked the walkie-talkie off and set it down next to the stuff he'd borrowed from Bryan. He picked up his friend's Nine Inch Nails tape and considered listening to it. Instead, he found his own INXS tape and put that in.

Eighteen. Eighteen thousand dollars a year. He figured it would be about fifteen hundred a month. Almost four hundred a week before taxes. That would do. Drafting wouldn't be so bad. After a few years, if he worked hard enough, he'd be able to go out on

his own as an architect. Leonard decided his father was right not letting him major in art. No one could survive like that.

Bryan. Now, he would suffer. Graduate-teaching his way through a master's in English. Damn. If he had done what his parents asked him to, he'd be on his way to a managerial position at West Point Pepperell. He could've started at twenty thousand or more. But he'd be happy

in grad school. He'd be doing what he wanted. He wouldn't let his parents guide his life the way Leonard did.

Leonard decided not to let himself think about it. He lit a cigarette and turned up the music.

The road narrowed to one lane in each direction. Bryan slowed down. They were alone on the road as they drove over the Ocoee River bridge. The soft brown

paved highway eased them through gradual curves and hills. A river flowed beside them, reflecting spots of sunlight. The jagged rock wall on the other side of the road was draped with patches of moss and grass.

Bryan flashed his lights once. "My God . . . this is incredible."

"Sure is," Leonard said.

"I mean . . . wouldn't it be great to buy a small house up here and write? Nothing else. A trip to the



illustration by Darren Wilson

store every few days and just write."

"Yeah." Leonard checked his gas gauge.

"You could set up a studio on that cliff up there and let your mind soar. Roll down your window, man. It's great."

Leonard rolled down his window. He was cold. "How fast are we going?"

"I don't know. I've got to experience this, Len. I'll talk to you later."

Leonard rolled up his window. The seatbelt was too tight. He loosened it and shifted in his seat. He needed a break.

At 11:15, Leonard saw the sign for Murphy, North Carolina. He flashed his lights. "Bryan, I see Murphy up there."

"Yeah. I have the map pulled out. Just follow my lead, okay?"

"I'm right behind you," Leonard said.

* * *

A half hour later, Bryan was far ahead of Leonard. Murphy's stop signs and traffic lights wove patterns too intricate for Leonard to keep up. The Saturday afternoon traffic wouldn't allow any two cars to stay together for long. After backtracking and circling Murphy in search of Bryan's Gremlin, Leonard gave in to the idea that Bryan did not pull over and wait for him. He stopped at Ned's Gas & Go, between the Wal-Mart and a feed store, and went inside to call Jenny and Coop's. Bryan had the directions, but Leonard still had their number.

The woman behind the counter looked up from her magazine when he walked in. "Hi, there! How are you today?" she asked.

She was reading *Cosmopolitan*. Leonard found it funny that a clerk in Murphy, North Carolina, would consider herself a cosmopolitan, but he didn't feel like laughing. "Where's your telephone?"

"Right yonder next to the anti-freeze."

"Thanks."

The woman nodded and smiled.

10

One of the anti-freeze containers must've been open or cracked. The smell was sweet and made Leonard's stomach feel more hollow than it was. He dug out a quarter and dialed the number. The line rang three times. Leonard was nervous. Scared. If they weren't home, he would never find Bryan. Four rings. He wondered whether they would answer the phone if they knew it was him. Five rings. He hoped Bryan would answer at least. On the seventh ring someone answered.

"Hello?" It was Coop. Leonard wanted to hang up, but he had to talk to Bryan.

"Hi, Coop. This is Leonard."

"Hey, buddy! Where are you?"

"Ned's Gas & Go. I lost track of Bryan."

"He's right here. We weren't sure whether to wait for you or not. The food's on the table. Do you know how to get to us?"

Coop gave him the directions and Leonard pretended to be grateful. He got along okay with Jenny and Coop. He didn't hate them or anything. He just didn't really know them. They were Bryan's friends, and Bryan seemed to like it that way.

They were halfway through eating when Leonard got there.

"Len! I thought you were right behind me," Bryan said.

"I was until you ran the yellow light."

"You should've gone for it. I was getting worried."

"Sorry." Leonard sat down and ate while Bryan told Jenny and Coop about his job at the University of Massachusetts, and the short story he'd just finished. It was a fictional third-person autobiography about a five-year-old who became a god. Leonard didn't like carrots. They wouldn't have been so bad if they were still warm. The steak was fine, except that Bryan forgot to tell Jenny that Leonard liked steak well-done. When Leonard finished eating, they went to the living room, and he drank coffee while Jenny and Coop talked to Bryan.

"Remember the Nine Inch Nails concert?" Bryan asked.

"Oh, my God. I'd almost forgotten. I thought Jenny would kill me when the battery died."

"The battery died?" Leonard asked.

"Uh, we forgot to tell you about that, Len." Bryan looked nervous. "The streetlights were so bright I didn't notice the headlights were on. We got your car jump-started though. And, hey, I did give it back to you with a full tank of gas."

"Oh, barely," Coop said. "You were so worried that we'd run out you were coasting in neutral on the interstate just to save fumes!" Coop rolled in laughter. "If you hadn't been so drunk, I would've thought you were crazy."

Bryan had told Leonard he wouldn't drink that night. The Gremlin was broken down and, at the time, Jenny and Coop didn't have a car. Bryan had borrowed Leonard's car with the provision that he wouldn't drink. Leonard let it go. Jenny's coffee was much better than the stuff at the Huddle House. It needed more cream, but Leonard didn't want to bother her about it.

At around 1:00, Leonard started looking at and playing with his watch, hinting to Bryan that they needed to leave. As they walked out to their cars, Jenny shouted "Bye" to Leonard. He turned and waved.

He got in his car and put an R.E.M. tape in his deck. He followed Bryan out of Murphy, singing the lyrics to "Feeling Gravity's Pull," wondering how much more pull he could take. *Stop thinking about it. Stop thinking. Stop.*

When R.E.M. was over, Leonard searched his passenger seat for another band. There was nothing new. He put in the Nine Inch Nails tape and tried to enjoy the artsy stuff Bryan was obsessed with.

The lazy four-lane trek past Murphy was vivid with the browns, oranges, yellows and reds of autumn. Leonard never quite captured that with paint. Winter was easy. Blue, white, dark brown. But autumn. There's the rub. Someday when he was rich

enough to sit back and enjoy life, he'd buy the best paints on the market. He'd have an easel that could soak in paint like a paper towel, or one smooth as cold metal. He'd pull images out of his soul and scream in passion at the flashes of reds, browns, and blacks.

Then the four-lane stopped.

Bryan flashed his lights. "Hey, Len, did you see that sign?"

"No, what was it?"

"It said 'Entering Nantahala Gorge: Caution.' Isn't Nantahala where they filmed Deliverance?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"Sewwweee pig!" Bryan shouted.

"I hope not. How fast are we going?"

"I had to slow down to 35. This looks pretty dangerous. Hey, look at that river."

On the right side of the road, a white, rushing stream raced with their cars. Leonard didn't watch it long. The road broke suddenly to the left, following the path of the water and the cliff. The cliff. Sharp turn right. The cliff draped with vines and kudzu. Downhill. Sharp turn left. Sunlight flickered between the ceiling of branches and vines.

"You there, Bryan?"

Bryan paused. "Yeah. This is great! I wish I could go faster through here."

Leonard wanted to slow down. He wanted to stop. Sharp turn left. "I'm signing off." The road slanted down to the right. Sharp turn right. "I need both hands on the wheel."

The road curved like a snake. Like a serpent. Leonard tried to concentrate on the music. Uphill and to the right. The music reminded him of Bryan. Bryan had stood in line for three tickets to the Nine Inch Nails concert. One for himself, and the other two for Jenny and Coop. He knew Leonard didn't want to go. Wrong music. Wrong crowd. But Bryan never asked him. Bryan never asked at all.

Leonard fought the road for minutes upon hours upon days upon months. He stared into the

Gremlin, keeping his car in line with it. Cars coming from the other direction flew by almost before Leonard could see them. The sunlight flashed like a strobe in his face. The road slanted down to the right, then to the left, then sharp turn left. Leaves whisked over his hood. He wanted a cigarette, but he couldn't move his hands. He wanted to be in the river. To splash across the rocks and rush in white foam, away from the Jennys and Coops and Bryans. Sharp coil to the right. Buy a house and write. Just write. Bryan was a good writer. That's what Leonard told him the time Bryan let him see the short story about the five-year-old god. Leonard loved it. Even more, he loved that Bryan wanted to share it with him. A week later, he asked Bryan if he'd like to see the paintings he'd spent years working on. That was when Leonard wanted to defy his parents and major in art. Bryan said he was too busy that day. Leonard kept his major in architecture.

After eleven minutes in the gorge, Leonard reached across his seat and picked up the walkie-talkie. He flashed his lights.

"Yeah, Len?"

"Let's stop."

"Aw, come on. This is great! Let's just get past this. I want to experience it all! I'm sure we're halfway through," Bryan said.

"Let's stop. I need to stop."

Uphill coil to the right.

"No way! I'll talk to you when we get out."

Static. Coil left. Leonard considered pulling over. But if he did that, Bryan might lose him. Maybe Bryan would keep going and never turn around. Leonard decided to let Bryan experience it. To let him have this moment. Leonard put down the radio and grasped the steering wheel. His knuckles were white. His fingertips were red. The music began to feel good. It began to feel.

I'm down to just one thing
And I'm starting to scare
myself.

Sunlight bounced off Bryan's bumper. Leonard didn't squint. Coil left. The music stopped. Ride it out. The vines stretched over the road were thick with leaves. Coil down. The serpent. The stare of the serpent. The cobra. Birds don't move. The fan of the neck. The birds don't move. Coil up.

* * *

The river and the cliff gradually dropped away. The road leveled out and opened up to four-lane again. Bryan flashed his lights. They'd been in the gorge for half an hour.

Leonard's knuckles were still white. His fingertips were red. Bryan flashed his lights again, and Leonard leaned back in his seat. He relaxed his grip on the steering wheel and stared at the fingernail impressions on his palms. Bryan flashed his lights again. Leonard picked up the walkie-talkie.

"You okay back there?"

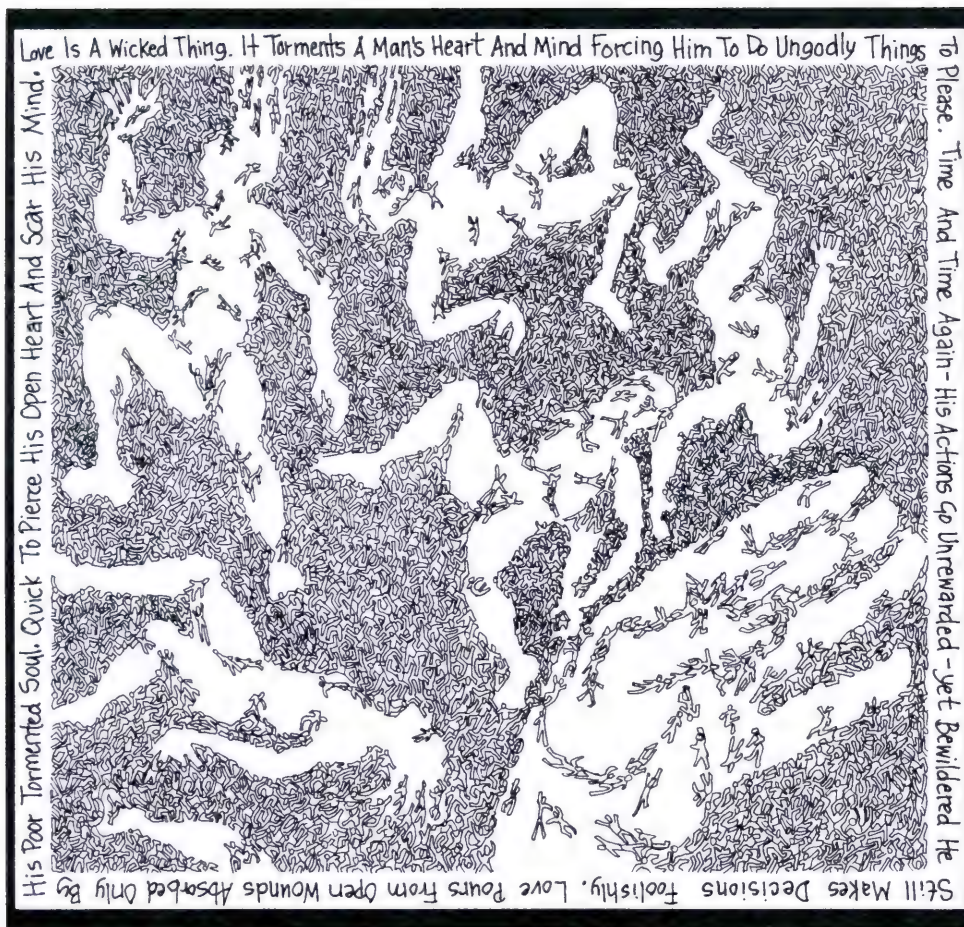
"We should've stopped, Bryan."

"I'll pull over at the next station, okay, Len?"

"You do that." Leonard put the radio down and wiped the sweat off his neck.

Bryan flashed his lights. A blue sign on the side of the road said, "BRYSON CITY 2 MI. GAS FOOD AND LODGING." Bryan waved his arm out the Gremlin window and pointed at the sign. Leonard found a cigarette in the passenger seat and pressed in the car lighter. Bryan flashed his lights again. Luckily, the Bic lighter still worked. The cherry glow of burning tobacco almost matched the color of the Gremlin's flashing rear lights. He pulled the smoke into his lungs and balanced it there like gargling water. Bryan turned down the exit ramp. Out of his rearview mirror, Leonard could see Bryan turn down the exit ramp, staring at him in disbelief. Leonard kept going. He lost sight of Bryan and exhaled.





"Quick to pierce," Chris Naylor, pen and ink drawing 8" x 7"

She Said

"It's so hot," she said.

The ice smokes in the man's glass,
The rain only serves to humidify
the heat's hateful presence.

"I love you," you want to whisper.

But suntanned promises soon
fade to white.
White barefoot children conquer
and fall to the gushing fountain.

"One of the hottest days yet," you reply.

The sun is seemingly squatting
on the thirsty blacktop.
And you start to promise,
To give it away.
But the briny sweat from your forehead
Now falls and sears your vision.

"It's so hot," she said.

But as you wipe your eyes,
You realize
That each passing hour
Brings with it, cooler temperatures.

Todd Deery



untitled, Ralph Watson, ink wash 11" x 14 1/4"

At Seventeen

We come now to the space which is boy-shaped.
It has always been there, filled or
unfilled.

"Come ride with me on my motorcycle,
we'll do the whole mile-square by
moonlight" and we rode,
I clinging to that boy shape with
all the girl shape I was, and the
moon made shadows of us
on the corn rows, and we scared
ourselves on the corners, and laughed
as loud as we dared
and swung on home before the night
could get us.

Clara Jackson

Of Old Trees, Old Houses, and University Community

By Elizabeth Gregory

It is February 7, 1991, and once again Auburn's physical history is being removed to make way for its future. This time, we are losing trees in Samford Park and along Thach Avenue, to allow for "fixing" the lopsided intersection where College and Thach meet.

I understand that this enterprise has something to do with traffic and with football Saturdays, but I must admit that I am not sure of all the arguments for and against it. I was under the impression that, although the intersection was certainly awkward, everyone *knew* it was awkward and so knew to drive slowly and carefully through it. In a town as full of pedestrians and cyclists as Auburn, this state of affairs seemed a Good Thing. However, this heavily traveled intersection will now join the extensive list of those through which motorists feel confident enough to zoom, regardless of pedestrians or the color of the traffic light.

But, again, the mysteries of traffic control and city planning are not within my realm of understanding, and I certainly do not wish to advocate continuing a genuinely dangerous situation. My concern is the trees: the trees and all the other bits of old Auburn that are being rooted up, torn down, or otherwise discarded in favor of the "new" Auburn. Just what the new Auburn is supposed to be I'm not exactly sure, but it seems to be composed largely of glass, brick, concrete, and of

course asphalt for the requisite parking lots.

I am not suggesting that Auburn, city and university, step back in time. I love Auburn, and I am proud of its reputation as one of the finest universities in the South. If Auburn is to maintain the quality of education and the quality of life it offers, change is inevitable. I just wish that change could be accomplished with a little more sensitivity and a little less violence to the parts of Auburn that are made of wood, leaves, and earth.

Did you know that College Street once was lined on both sides with trees—trees so large their branches met in an arch over the street? The trees in Samford Park are the only remnant of that green canopy. If you consider certain pockets of town, like Samford Park and the residential neighborhoods a few blocks east and north of campus, you can get an idea of what Auburn once looked like. But the big trees on College Street are long gone; I myself have seen them only in pictures.

Aside from the obvious benefits of the shade and oxygen they offer, the trees give Auburn a vital part of its essential "Auburn-ness." I submit that Auburn people, particularly the students, who go on to become alumni (who, we hope, go on to fondly remember and generously support their alma mater), do not reminisce about the abundance of parking lots or the beauties of Haley Center (or any of the other buildings from

Auburn's famous sealed-window period of architecture). They remember something much more intangible. They remember how Auburn "felt," its personality and charm.

During my self-imposed exile in graduate school, I thought about Auburn a great deal. I remembered Auburn covered with leaves in the fall, the birds and squirrels playing in the old quad, acorns and pine cones crunching under my feet. I have visited many universities that seem to have spontaneously risen from the parking lots which surround them, the campuses resembling mazes of commercial office buildings. No doubt the process of education goes on in these places just as effectively as it does at Auburn; one classroom is after all very like any other, as long as there are teachers and students within.

But college is more than classrooms; it is education, growth and maturation. A great deal of that takes place outside the classroom; it results from living, away from home, on campus or off, in the college and the town that surrounds it. Auburn is a nurturing environment, a place where past and present coexist, where idealism and other intangibles are understood, where students can learn and experiment with their lives in safety. Perhaps that's too much to attribute to a few old trees and houses, but I do know that education on these other campuses seems a much colder, more sterile process.



The Armstrong house, circa 1930.
(Armstrong-Gregory family collection.)



The funeral procession of Lt.
Gen. Lewis A. Pick traveling down
Gay Street, December 1956.
(Courtesy Auburn University
Archives.)



A view from the water tower, showing the trees lining College Street
and Samford and Comer Halls, circa 1925. (Courtesy Auburn University
Archives.)

And speaking of old houses, those on the streets surrounding the campus are another important part of Auburn's uniqueness which, unfortunately, is also rapidly disappearing. Years ago, these houses were where college faculty and staff and other townspeople lived with their families. These streets were real neighborhoods, where people could walk from house to house, children rode bicycles and waded in creeks, and college students rented rooms or apartments. One by one, most of these houses have come down.

The Armstrong house, which stood near the corner of Armstrong Street and Samford Avenue, is one example. This house belonged to my grandmother's family for many years; her grandparents purchased the house shortly after the Civil War. Her grandfather, Henry Clay Armstrong, was state Superintendent of Education, a trustee of Alabama Polytechnic Institute, and U.S. Consul General at Rio de Janeiro.

My grandmother was born in that house in the early 1900s (she wouldn't like me to tell you the year), and she and my grandfather were married in the front parlor, by the big stone fireplace, in 1929. Though not a fine or grand house, it did have a certain personality. For example, underneath the windows on the front porch were little swinging, door-like flaps; when the windows were open, you could swing open the flaps and walk through. My grandfather made his entrance at the wedding through one of these windows.

In the 1930s, the family sold

the house, and years later it was broken up into apartments. As part of various renovations, the window-flaps were sealed and the stone fireplaces and many of its other features removed. Never having seen the house in its original condition, as a child I had amusing but inaccurate visions of my grandfather, all dressed up for the wedding, hoisting his long legs over the sill to climb through the window. With the house, a little bit of our family history was lost.

In the early 1980s, the house was moved by its current owners to their farm where it is to be restored. In its place on Armstrong Street, a two-story row of brick apartments went up. The street was really no longer a neighborhood, and destruction of the house was inevitable. I am grateful that the owners are preserving this house, which contains a little bit of Auburn's and my family's history.

Many other houses in Auburn, like the Steadham house that stood on the Opelika Road, the Pace house that used to be near Wal-Mart, and the Neva Winston house on Gay Street, have fortunately met a similar fate. The first two have been moved to the country and lovingly restored, and the Neva Winston house has been chosen to be the focal point of the new rural life museum, which will be located on a piece of land out Wire Road. It is not insignificant, I think, that each of these houses will stand, presumably in safety, outside the city limits of Auburn.

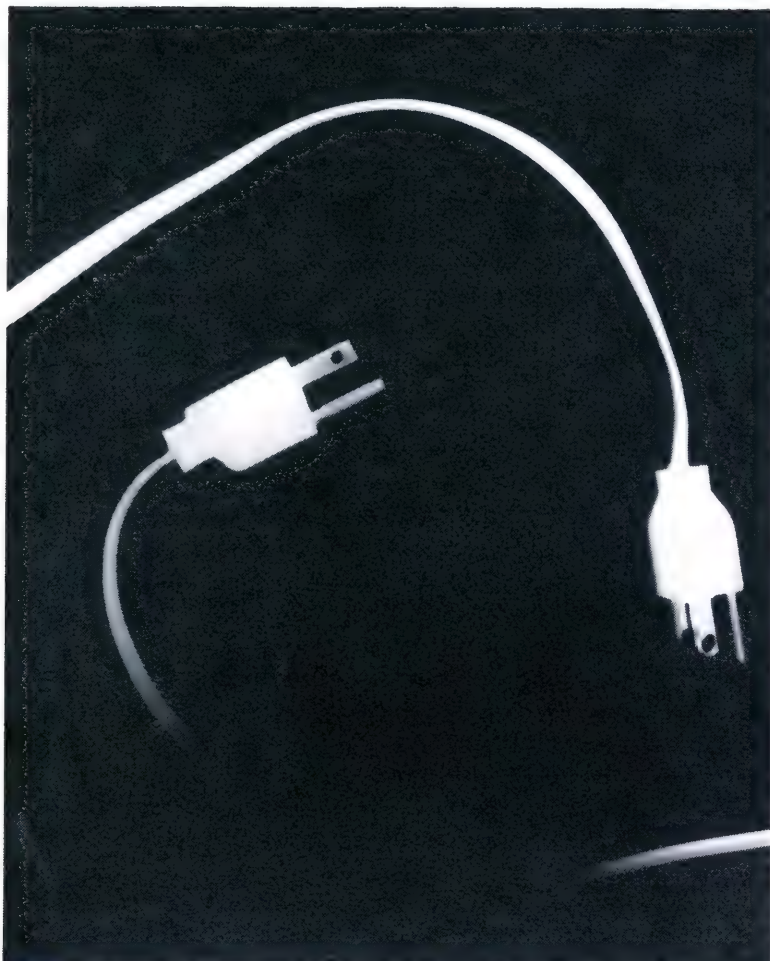
However, most houses were not so lucky. Gay Street once was lined with beautiful cozy little cottages, only a fraction of

which are still standing. Most were simply torn down to make way for apartments and fast-food establishments. Now, I am as fond of french fries and tacos as anyone else, but I believe that with the destruction of these houses, Auburn has lost an important part of its community. These houses, these neighborhoods once were the point at which the city and the university came together, where "town and gown" met.

Now that the houses are gone, that opportunity for casual contact and interaction, and the resultant fellowship and understanding, is lost. The students are confined in their posh brick ghettos, and the faculty and other townspeople have fled to subdivisions miles and miles from campus. It seems that the various segments of the university population prefer to be insulated from each other; the phrase "university community" has a rather hollow ring.

And perhaps that is, finally, what I am really trying to talk about, the true feeling of *university community*, the wonderful benefits of living in a college town. A college town does not have to be a bustling, shiny city; it can afford the luxury of preserving the past, just for its aesthetic pleasures or just for its own sake. Auburn is, at its best, a place where old and young, past and present, can live together and learn from each other. As I watch the trees fall in Samford Park, it is my hope for Auburn, city and university, that the remaining old trees and old houses will survive, to shelter and nourish Auburn people for many years to come.





"Would-Be Lovers," Rick Helmick, photogram 8" x 10"

Unumbilical

With scissored words
We cut the cord.

You tied your end first,
Red, pulsing pathway
Beginning to slack,
Re-circulating redness past:
Daring resuscitation,
Bracing separation,
While passion shriveled hollow blue.

Sealed resolution,
I tied my end.
Newborn and bloodied
I welcome the scar.

Kathy Graham

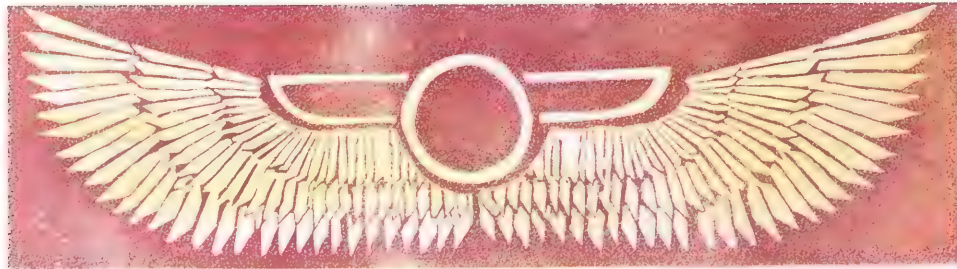
Gallery

Art by Chris Naylor

Chris Naylor graduated from Auburn winter quarter 1991 with a degree in visual arts, concentrating in visual communication and graphic design. The original prints depicted here were produced by a printing method known as intaglio. This Italian method of printing is done by etching the subject matter into the surface of a metal plate. The intaglio process used for "Sitting Bull" and "Rain Dance" is aquatint, which uses acid to create tonal passages on the plate.



"Rain Dance," print 20" x 17"



"Sitting Bull," print 15 1/4" x 22"

A Glimpse of Mojave:
10:27 am, November 23, 1990

Great rows of naked steel armies,
Thin-legged and countless, connected at stiffened joints

By dancing-silver cables.
And what do they guard?

The Adelonto Cement Co., fortified with sand
Which once scattered beneath the wind; the High Desert

Saloon, with all three rusted pick-ups
Slowly decomposing in the dirt lot; and the Mexican

Blanket stand at the intersection of 138 and Big Bear,
Where an old lamp-shade of a woman smiles and waves

At the automobiles as they brake
For the .410-blessed stop sign. Certainly not

The C.D.C.A.*, where the joshua trees are bandits
Cloaked in the tattered remnants of vapor trails,

And the wind-beaten brush clenches itself like a thousand fists
Of rowing slaves. Here the chollas lie hopelessly

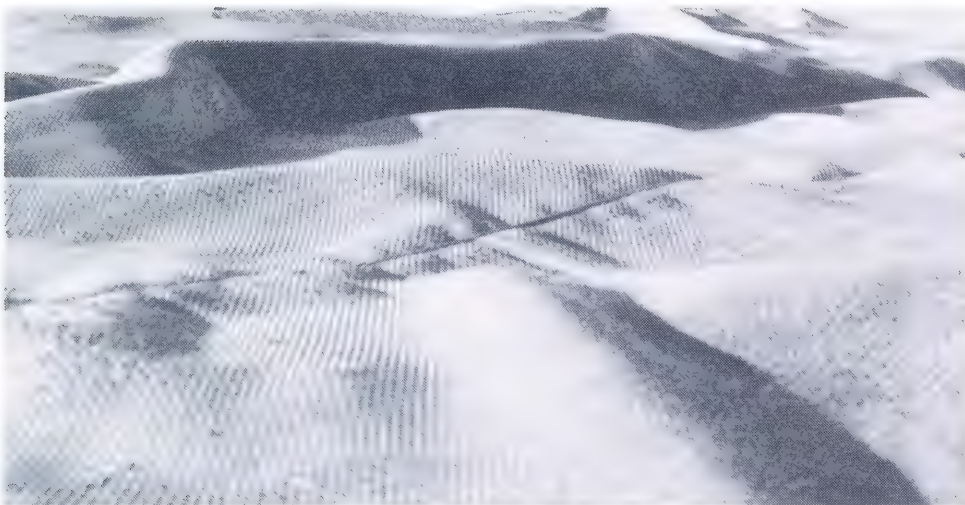
In ambush while a cactus wren sucks juice
From the pith, and megamachines pierce feverishly

Into the core of a mountain in search of chalk.
Here stand the towering troops of signless highways

And electricity's constant assault.
And what do they guard?

Simmons B. Buntin

* California Desert Conservation Area.



"New Landscape No. 2," Patrick Cassady, photograph 9" x 6"



untitled, David McCormick, photograph 8" x 10"

Papilion

I chewed my path
on sticky stems of small choice:
straight ahead or straight behind.
Forks were few and far between.
Now out of the mesh I see—
through saffron eyes—
a world of sugar water.
Though my flight seems random—
I light where color overflows.
Like lungs my wings move
while dandelions call to mind
fuzzy larval fancies.
My feet continue clover chains
till spring and I float softly down
beneath the summer buds—
where ants scrape clean
all but powdered wings
for perhaps a child to find
fingertips of dust.

Camille Burkley

A Silent Winter's Prayer

Purple tongues
lie silent on the ground,
voiceless to the cold,
powerless but to whisper faintly
in the wind.
Stiff and bloodless they rot,
the million tongues,
with their million languages which once spoke
together as the language of the trees,
silenced by time,
banished like blasphemers
from their wooden tower of Babel.
Pious winds blow noiseless through barren branches
of wooden towers which reach
naked and sleepy into the sky
as their purple tongues lie lifeless,
expiring in the quiet
of a silent winter's prayer.

Jake Adam York



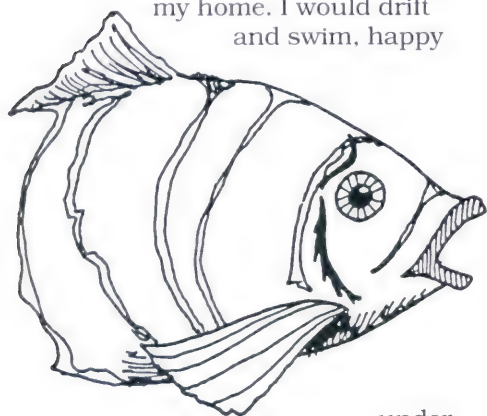
"Le joie des fleurs," Julie Meadowcroft, print 20" x 15 3/4"

Fish Lips

By Lee Zenor

Where is the sun? As I swim in my ruined home, I yearn.

Before the monsters and the blindness came, there was a better time, a time when the arrival of the sun meant comfort, a flow of abundant, rippling warmth and food through the water of my home. I would drift and swim, happy



under
the bright-
ness, not at

all afraid or angry.

I had my fun back when the light was good to me, before it began bringing the monsters with it. I could swim to any corner of my home, at any time. I would swim laps along the walls, and they were easy and familiar. I would brush against them and enjoy the contact as part of what my home gave me. I would swim into the little tickling visitors, bubbles who swam constantly out of their own humming house, always leaving, rising to depart through my roof. Though they never stayed long, I called them my friends because they gave pleasure to me. Their touch was a tickling massage, their whispers a satisfied chuckling. Not once did they hurt me.

When the sunlight touched the bubbles rising through my home, it made them a warm, waving fin of jewels. If only they had stopped to play . . .

But the sunlight did bring the monsters. Those huge creatures had come with the daylight and

abused my body and my home—they would pound on my eyes as they pounded on my walls. Their sounds hurt me, striking my eyes, drumming and plucking my whole body. The monsters abraded my happiness by assaulting me with sounds, and I could see them through the clear walls of my home as they hurt me.

The monsters and the pain travelled with the light, so I came to hate the sun, to be happy without it, because that was when I was free from the monsters. When darkness surrounded me, when my friends the bubbles swam up into the darkness, I was at peace. There were no intrusions, no dangers to stir the humming darkness into a pounding uproar.

The nights were without noise, only the soothing hum of the bubbles, which never abandoned me. Did sounds not hurt them, or were they better friends than I had thought, to stick with me through those daytime attacks?

Unexpectedly, even that dark-time peace was destroyed. There were only light and darkness. There were only enemy and friend.

One last time the light came, and with it the worst attack in my memory, one that I could not defend myself from. Frenzied movement and an eye-hammering noise ruptured peace.

When it was over, my world, my very home, had changed. Darkness had come abruptly, and its peaceful embrace turned sickening. Night was ruined the same way the daytime had been warped. All was darkness. And darkness became, and still is, my enemy.

The sun has not yet reappeared. That final attack brought this lightlessness. Did the monsters actually kill the sun? As they killed my humming neighbors. I swim to where they should

be—I bump into their home, then find its top, and the bubbles aren't there. I feel no massage, no tickling touch. I am happy that my friends no longer join me in my cursed, shaken home. They, at least, are spared the long misery.

I have no friends now, but something else has come—or is coming. I do not know what it is. I can't see it. I can't hear it. But I do sense its closeness.

I stay away from the walls. I hope they protect me.

Something that frightens me is coming closer, but I have no anger. My own home violated, ruined, and I am empty of anger even toward this approaching alien. When the monsters had come, to beat against my walls, I coldly turned my back, resolved to show them no activity—none of my fright. They usually stayed outside my home, so I couldn't fight them any other way, but I did then have my rage to throw at them.

But whatever is coming—and maybe it is not yet inside my home with me—I am allowed no anger. I can't turn my back to the menace, can't stare it into retreating. I can only fear. When I need my anger, I am not strong enough to grasp that weapon, and my impotence hurts. When I turn my back, it is a coward's trick, not a fighter's tool. My only hope is that the presence won't come to me. I won't hunt it, if it doesn't hunt me.

As I drift in a world that no longer works, I starve, I stifle. Any movement I do make requires increasing effort and more rest afterward.

Something tickles me!

I stir, excited by a nice presence in this blind world. I feel further touches.

Friends! I know where I am, and for a moment I forget to feel fear as I relish the touch of one of

my old home's plants. Pictured in my mind is a friend that the light used to make green, a single strand reaching from the floor to where only the hummers have ever gone.

It had fins, and one of those is tickling my side.

I bite it.

And I bite it again and again, for I am hungry, and it is docile. I can't stop myself. I forget the fear in the rapture of my first satisfaction in so long.

All of my home's pleasures have fled the great darkness; my filthy new home embraces me. The unpleasant contact is inescapable, though I no longer test its grasp. If we can't get along together, I don't know what will happen.

I may find out. There is no more food, and I am struggling in the heat—yet the darkness is sending me something that feels closer, meaner, every time I rouse to notice it. I will be very weak by the time it arrives, and it already feels very powerful; perhaps my lack of sight and anger is its own weapon, to melt me into an easier victim.

Why is this happening to me?

I huddle atop the old home of the bubbles, for I feel safest this close to where my friends once were. No longer do I sleep below. The once-familiar wrinkles of my pebbly floor are gone, replaced by lightless dips and rises that I don't know or like. My movements are very sloppy, so I will wait here. If the thing I feel is down there in the pebbles, and doesn't come up to bother me, then we can be neighbors.

As I once learned to get along with the darkness, away from the sun's danger, I must find a way to adapt to this thick, hostile night, to ease my discomfort. I hurt. I wish to hurt less, if at all.

One world is gone, a new one is here for me to swim through. I must learn this new place, this new neighbor, fit myself to it all until this is my home. The sun-

light is gone, the bubbles have left—they were pleasant, but not the only pleasures the world could offer. I will learn to like this blindness, this lonely blindness. I will discover new pleasures.

It is time to start over, reclaiming joy by my own decision to be happy. All else I have has been taken.

* * *

Gone! The children are gone!

This was the first time he had been back since the last day of school. Even the cleaning crew was gone, so he had used his key to get in. His first year of teaching had ended with a nine-day vacation that left him feeling like a free man—with a suntan, no less.

Now he walked through carpeted halls ready to flinch from the first sound—but he heard nothing. The kids, even their high-pitched echoes, were gone. Drawings and posters were gone, taken by their creators or trashed by someone else. His own steps as he went to his classroom barely made a sound.

Silence. It felt good to be alone, away from kids, neighbors, and friends. He tasted the lack of sound, savored it, and was content when even his door opened quietly.

The morning sunlight flooded in through the eastern wall of windows, illuminating a room strangely hollow after it was stripped and cleaned, all its desks in the halls.

He flipped the switch, lighting up the hollow chamber. His desk and chair had been moved, not removed, when the carpet was cleaned.

Soon realizing that the lights were on, but the air conditioning wasn't, he kicked back from his desk and stood up, determined not to work and sweat at the same time. In one of the cabinets there should be a little fan.

The sun was bright and hot upon the clean surface of the

cabinet-top, reminding him how nicely his summer vacation had begun. When he opened a shelf door, the impact of a stench sent him reeling.

His eyes focused upon a shadowed bulk behind the next door.

Slamming that door open, slapping it to keep it from bouncing back, he observed the origin of the rotten smell. Because the kid who had been planning to take the fish home for the summer hadn't come in time to pick it up, it was now a stinking mess that he had to deal with.

The fish probably hadn't been fed since the last day of school—he'd hidden the expensive aquarium to keep it from being stolen, and

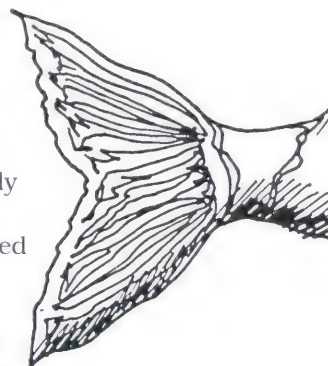
since it was still here, nobody had touched it. The water wasn't clear

anymore; he'd had to unplug the aerator to hide the equipment. All the plants were gone, too. Lacking an air supply, the water had turned cruddy. This tiny pond had died of suffocation.

There, looking ragged, rested the body of his fish. That would make it easier to clean—just dump it all outside, spray the green crud off the walls. He could buy new pebbles and stuff.

The kids had liked taking care of the fish, talking to it, cleaning its home, so he'd get another one—maybe even another pretty clown fish. It had lasted most of the school year, had survived to see the summer, just like him.

Yeah, he'd get a new fish for the next school year.





"In your eyes," Karin Fecteau, photograph 8 1/2" x 5 3/4"



*untitled, Michael Scheiderich, photograph
8" x 10"*

Nailing Snake Bellies

By Aaron Leary O'Kee

As Nelda Jean made her cautious way up the rickety steps, she noticed the absence of yard animals. Most everybody kept a hound, some chickens, or at least a cat. But there were no



Nelda Jean brushed off a feeling of foreboding. Her husband, Charlie, would not be pleased if he found out where she was this afternoon.

Flashes of white glinted off the walls of the cabin in the sterling afternoon light. A peculiar hollow, clinking sound rose and fell with the slight breeze, raising the fine downy hairs on the back of her neck.

It wasn't until she drew much closer to the house that she understood. Snake skeletons. Hundreds of them tacked to the outside wall of the simple frame dwelling. The wind moaned through the open vertebrae and cast them against each other in a macabre chime.

It gave Nelda Jean the creepers.

But this was a mission of desperation. If she and Charlie Ray didn't get rain soon, they would most certainly lose the crop. So now, here she was on the front stoop, actually within the grasp of the leering little house.

Out of the bottom corner of her eye, Nelda Jean detected a motion. Instinctively, her head snapped about to face the distraction. Simultaneously, her unconscious feet stepped back.

"Lord God Jehosephat!" squeaked Nelda Jean.

There, nailed in the center of the badly warped door, was a rattler, tail still flicking. Its hate-filled eyes bored into her own. Its reptilian tongue darted frenziedly in what Nelda Jean hoped was agony and not a promise of revenge.

Before she could recover her composure, the door was snatched open and Nelda Jean was looking into another pair of heavily lidded black eyes.

"What you want, girl?" hissed the ancient woman.

Nelda Jean had never seen a

woman upright who looked so old, almost eternal. The woman's eerily blue-black hair, done in a tattered beehive, reminded Nelda Jean of ball lightning caught in a thicket. She expected a moth to come frittering from the sticky-looking tangle any moment.

"Well, speak, girl! Cat gotcher tongue?"

"I come to git rain. Me and my husband got the place next to yourn. We're gonna lose it, lessen we git rain."

The old woman regarded her impassively. Nelda Jean thought maybe she hadn't heard.

"I can pay."

Nelda Jean reached into her pocket and pulled out the ruby-colored jelly. It glowed jewel-like in the dark shade of the porch.

A slight lightening of countenance passed over the old woman's face as her eyes caught the jelly, but it was gone so quickly that Nelda Jean felt she must have imagined it.

"There's more where this came from."

Nelda Jean held the jelly aloft, turning it to and fro so that the beveled edges of the glass would catch the scant sunlight beneath the porch.

"What kind is it?" growled the old woman as she licked her dry lips.

"Hot pepper jelly. Rita Johnson said you'd do business for hot pepper jelly."

The old woman closed her eyes as if meditating on this piece of information.

"Maybe I don't need no more pepper jelly. Ever think of that?"

"But you gotta!"

Nelda Jean reached out tentatively as if to touch the old woman, to make her understand the desperation behind this request.

The old woman seemed to

signs of life around the swept yard. Not even a stray sprig of grass poked through the finely patterned swirls of raked dirt. The breeze picked up, and Nelda Jean detected a faint odor she could not identify, mildly pleasant, like fresh-turned dirt after a late thaw.

She crossed the narrow wooden stoop to peer with cupped hands through the dirty pane of the long, low window next to the door. She could see only thick lace curtains, yellowed with age and closed against her prying eyes. The weight of the ruby-colored jelly hung heavily in her apron pocket.

She had almost turned back when she saw the strange little cabin perched and grinning cock-eyed in the clearing. One post from the front porch had completely rotted away and hung drunkenly askew like an unbalanced steeple or an oversized barbecue skewer jutting toward the sky. The ancient tin roof winked over the unshuttered window on that side of the house.

contract within herself. Her eyes crawled downward, resting on Nelda Jean's trembling hand. Such a look of distaste passed over the ancient features that Nelda Jean felt burned and quickly withdrew her reach.

"Look, ma'am, you just gotta help." Nelda Jean detested the pleading in her voice.

Their eyes locked. One set pale and blue and fearful, the other glittering cold and dark.

A moment passed. Something far and distant softened in the old woman's eyes.

"Come on in," she growled, stepping aside only enough so that Nelda Jean could just squeeze past the still-squirming snake.

Inside it was night. The heavily shuttered windows pinched out the fingers of sunlight. A worn sofa, a behemoth of vermilion horsehide, claimed most of the tiny cabin. Dusty-looking burlap sacks hung pendulously on the raw wooden walls, a mockery of those unfortunate remains scattered on the outside of the cabin. Great drooping bundles of odd-looking tubers hung motionless in the fetid air. The odor was even more pungent inside, but Nelda Jean still could not put her finger on it. She realized that she had been staring and blushed, embarrassed.

"You may as well sit down," croaked the old woman, and she patted the dusty vermilion sofa. Soft, swirling fogs seemed to rise from the tips of her fingers.

Nelda Jean made her way nervously through the maze of heavy Victorian furniture overburdened with bric-a-brac and eased herself onto the sofa as far from the woman as the contorted mahogany arms would allow.

"The Lord God in heaven makes the rain," breathed the old woman, her eyes cast heavenward as if delivering a litany or, perhaps, a eulogy.

Nelda Jean gave a nervous nod in response. Though speechless with fear, she kept her eyes riveted on her host.

The old woman returned the

nod as if somehow oddly satisfied and leaned heavily toward Nelda Jean as if to impart some last wish.

She was close enough now for Nelda Jean to see the dry crinkles around her eyes and smell the long-dead flower smell of her old lady dusting powder.

"But this world belongs to the Prince of Darkness, now. Do you know that, chile?" The old woman seemed to peer right down into Nelda Jean's heart. Whatever she saw encouraged her to continue.

"This world is not my home. No sir, I've better waiting for me." The old woman wrapped her arms tightly around her self and began to rock to and fro humming a discordant tune. The faded irises drifted upward beneath the crepey lids, leaving parchment-colored blanks. The old woman's head fell back and her toothless mouth fell slack.

Silence reigned, except for the monotonous ticking of a clock somewhere.

Unsure of what to do, Nelda Jean turned the jelly over and over inside her pocket. The cool, thick glass was a comforting talisman in her damp hands.

After a small space, the toothless mouth gave off a sputter and the yellow of the woman's eyes began to fill. The draped flaps fluttered and the bird-like neck drew itself erect. Sense again shone through the time-bleached pupils.

Looking somehow renewed, "No, resurrected," thought Nelda Jean, the old woman peered cautiously into the air about her. She placed her gnarled hands across her mouth and, to Nelda Jean's surprise, she giggled.

"There's city four square . . .," began the old woman in a broken trill, but Nelda Jean cut her off. Enough was enough.

"I come for rain, not religion. Now, you gonna help me or not?"

"It's not an easy thing you ask me, girl." The crone seemed even more alert; avarice crept into the still, damp eyes.

"No siree! Rain don't come easy. Takes lots of practice to git as good as I am."

"I told you I can pay."

"But you don't know the price yet. You might not want to pay." The old woman's face took on a sly cast.

"The Lord's done told me I ain't long for this old world. Where I'm going I shore won't be needin' no pepper jelly."

"Whatever it is, if I'm able, I'll pay." Frustrated, Nelda Jean slammed the jelly down on the cracked marble table. The noise was like a gunshot.

"Very well." The old woman encircled the jelly with her claws.

"Hot pepper jelly will do very nicely for now."

Nelda Jean watched the sparkling glass disappear in the dark, voluminous folds of the woman's skirt.



illustration by Darren Wilson

The hag rose painfully from the sofa and began to pace around it, encircling Nelda Jean so that she had to crane her neck in order to keep her in view.

"As the Lord has seen fit to deliver this world over to Satan for him to do with as he will, it is necessary to bind that old liar in order for true and holy Nature to take her course."

The woman ceased her pacing and pointed a bony finger toward Nelda Jean.

"Now, do you know how Satan appears most often on this earth?"

Nelda Jean was spellbound. Her mouth hung open slightly as she gave a weak nod.

"As a snake!" The old woman was at a fever pitch. "That's right! Remember Adam and Eve in the garden? Remember Moses in the desert? And it was a serpent that bit Saint Paul after the shipwreck."

Nelda Jean had had minimal religious training, but somehow, suddenly, things began to click. She recalled every one of those Bible stories, and it was true! The trouble always involved a snake. The old woman was right.

Nelda Jean's face became rapt with attention. "Go on."

"Well, the Lord Jesus said that what we bind on earth shall be bound in heaven." Nelda Jean nodded. She recollected something on that order from tent revivals.

"He also said them that followed Him would pick up snakes and not be harmed, drink any poisonous thing and it wouldn't kill 'em." The old woman came full circle and sat right next to Nelda Jean. Her wild eyes held Nelda Jean captive as she took Nelda Jean's slim white hands in her own calloused, dry ones. "You believe that, don't you?"

There was no hesitation. "Yes, ma'am, I do."

Pleased, the old woman patted Nelda Jean's hand. "Then we'll just bind that old serpent right now."

The woman led Nelda Jean back into the nested crannies of

the room. Brushing aside tattered remains of cobwebs, the old woman indicated a dilapidated wicker hamper from which emanated the foul odor Nelda Jean had marked earlier.

"You always heard snake bellies brang rain, I suppose."

This was stated matter-of-factly by the old woman. And it was true. Everybody in the hills knew that you pinned a snake down, belly side up, to call rain. But Nelda Jean had never understood why it worked.

The old woman reached a stringy arm down into the basket. Nelda Jean could hear them begin to stir and see the dark, sliding shapes between the cracks of the warped basket.

The old woman glanced at Nelda Jean over her shoulder. "I got an even dozen left over from my last hunt. Got to get 'em at night with a full moon, you know, or it won't work."

The old woman continued to angle around in the hamper.

Suddenly, Nelda Jean heard an angry hiss. The head of a huge rattler sprang from the confines of the hamper and attached itself to the fleshless skin of the old woman's upper arm.

The old woman danced about, turning over tables of bric-a-brac. The hamper tipped over and a seething mass of death made its way to the darkest corners of the room.

Finally, the old woman disengaged the rattler from her arm and flung it with a vengeance to the floor.

"Damn you, you misbegotten son of a whore!"

Snake eyes gleamed up at her. Nelda Jean could almost swear she saw it smile just before the old woman crushed its head with her heel.

"What a mess! Guess he won't be giving nobody troubles again, though."

Nelda Jean recovered her voice. "Ma'am, he bit you."

"I dare say he did." The old woman pulled at the bloodless skin beneath her arm. Many faint scars were visible, but two tiny

pricks were just beginning to well with blood.

"Reach over yonder to the kitchen and bring me a poultice outten the drawer. I keep 'em made up. Sometimes they ain't no time to lose."

Nelda Jean made her way gingerly the few steps over to the stained counter that served as both kitchen and dining area. Her eyes never left the floor. Any moment one of the escapees was likely to slither across her path.

"Which drawer?" Nelda Jean had started to say when she felt a liquid burning sensation just above her right ankle. Her heart froze in mid-beat.

Slowly she looked down, only in time to see the tail of a multicolored snake disappear beneath a crack in the cabinets.

"I been bit!" screamed Nelda Jean.

Color leaked from the old woman's face. Her black skirts fluttered and flapped as she quickly made her way to Nelda Jean.

"Been bit?" she croaked in disbelief as she raised Nelda Jean's skirt to get a better look.

Satisfied that the unthinkable had happened, the old woman opened the drawer and removed one of the poultices. It made a soft cracking sound as if it were filled with leaves and gave off an aroma faintly reminiscent of heather.

Nelda Jean felt her knees give way. She was still perfectly conscious, extraordinarily so, it seemed. It was just that her legs wouldn't mind her.

"That's right, dearie, just sit down right there." The old woman's wiry arms guided Nelda Jean gently down to the floor.

"Everything seems so clear. So bright," Nelda Jean thought, though she might have said it and slurred the words. The old woman seemed to understand her anyway.

The old woman cradled Nelda Jean's head in her lap and smoothed the damp tendrils from her forehead. She rummaged in

her pocket until she came out with the jelly.

"They's only enough for one of us."

"What?" asked Nelda Jean weakly. Bright colors were forming paint-pot swirls on the back sides of her eyelids and she was cold, so very cold, but she hadn't the strength to shiver.

"They's only enough to cure one of us, dearie." The old woman unscrewed the burnished top of the jar. Nelda Jean heard the faint popping sound as the vacuum was released.

The old woman put the jar to her withered lips. She looked down into the fresh, young face of Nelda Jean and stopped. Then, she set the jelly down.

"Commere, girl." The old woman wrestled with Nelda Jean's limp body until the unblemished face rested snugly in the crook of her arm. The old woman picked up the opened jar and placed the rim against Nelda Jean's lips. "Drink this down, now."

Nelda Jean's lips parted and the fiery liquid slid down.

"This is the sorriest jelly I ever did see. Didn't set worth a hill of beans."

The old woman jostled Nelda Jean, rubbing her in a long urging sweep from just beneath the chin to the pale throbbing hollow of her throat.

The jelly was like a hot poker searing its way down her gullet. Her whole body felt as if it would burst into flames. Acrid beads of sweat exuded from the whole surface of her skin, gathering in the folds of her arms, running along the hairline of her temple and down the seam of her back. Her gasping breaths only seemed to ignite the flames to further intensity. The pain was excruciating. Nelda Jean lost herself to the dark inferno.

When Nelda Jean came to herself, the afternoon was far gone. Her cheek rested on the stoniness of the old woman's shriveled breast. Weak light sniffed at the cracks between the threshold and the ill-hung door.

Nelda Jean raised herself up on

her elbows and peered into the old woman's face. "Ma'am? Ma'am?"

The old woman's eyes were open. There was a beatific expression on the creased face. A blackened filament of blood dried at the corner of her mouth.

Nelda Jean was not frightened. Death was familiar in the hills and not to be overly mourned. Nelda Jean picked up the old woman in her arms, carrying her as she would a stack of kindling for she weighed not much more, and laid her on the sofa. She pulled the crumples from the densely woven skirts and crossed the gnarled hands at the breast.

As an afterthought, she searched the old woman's right pocket and her fingers touched the peeled binding of a palm-sized book. A faded copy of the book of Psalms. This Nelda Jean slid delicately between the stiffening palms.

Nelda Jean proceeded to search the old woman's left pocket. Her fingers searched the commodious sack, brushing against a small resistance. Nelda Jean's fingers closed around the dollar-sized piece of paper that had been folded into the size of a dime.

"Chewed gum wrapped in foil?" wondered Nelda Jean. She retrieved the small parcel and held it in the flat of her palm. "Nope, it's a note."

Nelda Jean felt no compunctions as she carefully unwrapped the missive. The dead had no secrets.

Nelda Jean held her breath. It was addressed to her. Nelda Jean read it with mounting excitement. A recipe. A recipe for rain.

Assuring herself that there was no more that she could do for the old woman, Nelda Jean set about collecting the trappings of her new undertaking.

* * *

Charlie Ray made his way through the parched field up toward the house. He was god-awful tired. All he wanted was a cool glass of well water and to take off his heavy work boots. Halfway up the back porch steps, he heard a pounding on the side

of the house.

"Nelda Jean! Nelda Jean, what are you doing?" There was no answer, so he made his way around the corner of the stoop and there was Nelda Jean. She was standing on the butter churn nailing something to the side of the house. Whatever it was was messy, and she was using his best hammer.

"Nelda Jean, get down from there! And give me that!" Charlie Ray put his arms lovingly about her waist and placed her safely on the ground, then he snatched his hammer from her. "What in the hell are you doing?"

Nelda Jean opened her big blue eyes and gave him her best little-girl smile. "Nailing snake bellies."

Charlie Ray didn't hold much with superstitions, but he had learned to tolerate Nelda Jean's. "Did you have to nail six?" he laughed.

Nelda Jean sniffed at his lack of faith. "I know what I'm doing."

Charlie Ray put his arms around Nelda Jean and they walked up the back steps. "Did you hear?" he asked. "They found that old snake lady dead as a doornail this afternoon. Finally got bit, I expect."

Charlie Ray rubbed the darkening shadows on his face. "Sure did make a pile of money at it though. Folks all up and down this holler swear by her."

Together, they trudged up the back steps. Nelda Jean disengaged herself from her husband's arms and went into the kitchen to start his supper. Charlie Ray got him a dipper from the diminished rain barrel. As he bent forward to let the cool water run over the back of his head and neck, he noticed the wicker hamper set over next to the preserves.

"Nelda Jean, what's in the new hamper?"

Nelda Jean peered out through the screen door and shook her spoon at him. "Nothing you need bother about, Charlie Ray. Now come on in and eat your supper, darlin'."

Far in the distance came a sound of rumbling thunder.



untitled, Marcus Prevost, intaglio etching 4 ³/₄" x 3 ³/₄"



"Palazzo Ducale," Nancy Murphree, intaglio etching 4 ¹/₂" x 6"



"Cat Got Your Tongue," Karen Scarborough, sepia and prismacolor 12" x 12"



"Till the Cows Come Home," Karen Scarborough, tempera-resist 12" x 12"

To Bessie

A Parody of "To Elsie" by William Carlos Williams

The pure products of dairy
go crazy—
homogenized vitamin D

Watered, washed the fat
away
pasteurized into blue-white skim

Perhaps after the joining
of bull
and innocent bovine

she is saved from
the calf,
suckling and gnawing

beneath meated flanks,
joined
at the bulbous udder

some farmer's trade, some Bessie
relieved
of a calf

who gruel-fed and
boxed
grows into veal

she sidesteps
grazing
among steaming filth

Only with metal clamps
is milk
released

No one
with bucket
and stool, no one to drive the tractor.

Kimberly Wininger

The Wind

Sea anemone
translucent shade
haunts the deep
torpid
cool

sees an enemy
Bright branches wave
tempting meals
ersatz
jewels

Sea's indemnity—
trapped in death-daze
penalty
for sin's
rule

David Drake

On a Paper Plate Beach

Corrugated edges are dunes,
center gives way to ocean.

I came across a plastic spork,
a combination of weathered shell
and invertebrate detail.
The color of Dixie cups—
assorted pastel flower designs—
eyes like flexi-straws.
(Not striped. Swirling.)

When it pinched my thumb,
I noticed the dull curve
of spoon-claw on one side,
uneven knife-edge on the other.

Once set down,
it scuttled over napkin slopes
and tissue foam of wind-scattered beach,
straight into undertow.

As waves of giant's teeth loomed
heavily upon the gathering,
tiny black armies cast their lot into the sea,
black-headed gulls were born of
drifting chicken bones,
and I—
I turned towards my Olds
and felt that wind meet the sea.

Simmons B. Buntin

Half-Mast Heart

He listens . . .
for a distant gunshot
or the calling of his name
down empty corridors.
How they send the Hampton boy
in college days and puppy love.
To them he's just a soldier boy
with a half-mast heart.

He hears . . .
kitchen sounds and sibling brawls,
and words from Dad; hear ye all.
Inaudible in their briefing.
How they fill his cereal bowl
with the milk of love and Apple Jacks.
He wonders can they send him back
soggy meals agreed?

He fights . . .
the sleep that wants to take him.
He listens . . .
only for what he needs.
He hears . . .
Christmas songs in Hampton.
He prays . . .
for his country and its greed.
And that they'll send the Hampton boy
back to college days and puppy love.
But until, he's just a soldier boy,
with a half-mast heart.

Enas Shonojn



"Morning Fog," Brad Wagner, photograph 9 1/4" x 7 1/2"



"Valley Head Rail," Robert Lee, photograph 7 1/2" x 9 1/2"

In Focus

Photography by Camille Burkley



Contributors

Simmons B. Buntin is a senior majoring in political science from Ocala, Florida. And yes, he's "slowly taking over" *The CIRCLE*.

Camille Burkley is a graduate student in the fisheries department from Natchez, Mississippi. She is currently studying water pollution and toxicology.

Patrick Cassady is a freshman majoring in visual arts from St. Petersburg, Florida. He enjoys throwing frisbee and playing pool with Jason and Todd.

Todd Deery is a senior in English from Maitland, Florida.

David Drake is an elusive contributor.

Karin Fecteau is a junior in visual arts from Huntsville, Alabama, but presently resides at Biggin Hall.

Kathy Graham is a senior in English from Athens, Alabama, who aspires to an extended adolescence in graduate school and a life of poverty, obscurity and peaceful decline in the academic world.

Elizabeth Gregory graduated from Auburn in 1984 with an English degree. In 1987 she received her master's from the University of Rochester and is currently working on her Ph.D. She is a publications editor for the Extension Service and is a member of *The CIRCLE* editorial board.

R. Helmick is from Huntsville, Alabama, and is a junior majoring in visual arts. He enjoys photography, painting and playing the guitar.

Clara Jackson is a freshman who transferred to Auburn from Samford University. Her hometown is Mountain Brook, Alabama. She is majoring in child psychology and English.

Todd Keith is a senior in English from Birmingham, Alabama. He likes cream in his coffee.

Robert Lee is a senior majoring in criminal justice from Huntsville, Alabama. Aside from being a photographer for the *Glomerata*, he is well known for suffering from a rare form of acute "relationshipitis" in his right hand.

David McCormick is David McCormick.

Julie Meadowcroft is from Dunwoody, Georgia, and is a graduating senior in illustration.

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Marcus Prevost is a graduate student in painting.

Karen Scarborough is a junior majoring in visual arts from LaGrange, Georgia. She is currently the art director for *The CIRCLE*.

Michael Scheiderich is a sophomore majoring in industrial design.

Enas Shonojn (nice name, Sean) is a senior in aerospace engineering from Oshkosh, Wisconsin. He works at Red

Lobster, where he enjoys receiving all sorts of interesting tips. Upon graduation, he hopes to become NASA's writer-in-residence.

Chris Smith is a senior majoring in English from Athens, Alabama, and Haddon Township, New Jersey. A former dictator of Zimbabwe, he is now Arts & Leisure editor of *The Plainsman* and editor-elect of *The CIRCLE*.

Elaine Spicer is a senior in sculpture but also enjoys doing a lot of print making. She is from Montevallo, Alabama.

Brad Wagner is from College Park, Georgia. He enjoys photography.

Ralph Watson is a senior in, guess what? . . . visual arts.

Darren Wilson is a junior majoring in visual arts from Huntsville, Alabama. His hobbies include bike riding, rappelling and selling Nikes.

Kimberly Wininger is a senior in English from Birmingham, Alabama. She plans to go on to graduate school in creative writing and hopes to return to Auburn and autograph old issues of *The CIRCLE* one day.

Jake Adam York is a freshman majoring in English from Gadsden, Alabama. He enjoys writing in the wee hours of morning and playing guitar until he can't feel his fingers.

Lee Zenor is a senior in industrial design. He enjoys creative writing and biking.



I'M SO UNHAPPY, BUT OH, SO GLAD
I'VE GOT IT PRETTY BAD. BUT FOR
FEEL SAD LIKE A STRAY, BABY LAMB
OH, SO GLAD I'M A FOOL TO WANT YOU
I CAN'T GET ALONG WITHOUT YOU... FOOLS RUSH IN
I HOPE IT'S A PLEASURE TO BE SAD... I'M